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SUBJECT: U.S. OBSERVATION TEAM FOR ACEH ELECTIONS: WHAT WE SAW

REF: JAKARTA 13462

11. (SBU) Summary: A comprehensive post-election analysis of questionnaires returned by members of the official U.S. election observation team confirm our initial report (reftel) that the gubernatorial and district administrative elections in the Indonesian province of Aceh on December 11 were free and fair. Observing over 100 polling stations across 13 districts, our delegation reported an election that was largely in compliance with accepted standards and free from attempts by authorities to intimidate or coerce voters on election day. Turnout at sites observed was generally high, ranging between 65 and 90 percent of registered voters. While a number of procedural problems were observed during the voting, these were not, in our opinion, sufficiently widespread or significant to cast doubt on the validity of the election results. Other monitoring groups have reported incidents which we did not see, but by and large our sampling of the process appears to have been representative of the overall conduct of the elections as a whole. Embassy is sharing these findings with the Aceh Election Commission (KIP). End Summary

12. (U) The Mission deployed a group of 40 USG employees in two-person teams to serve as election monitors during the December 11 provincial elections in Aceh. The team observed voting at over 100 polling stations in the capital of Banda Aceh and scattered across 13 provincial districts. They also witnessed the counting of votes at 22 sites. All team members possessed an official accreditation badge issued by the provincial election authority (KIP), which was required of all observers, and none of the team reported any difficulties in gaining access to polling stations.

13. (SBU) These reports confirm our initial assessment that the election was free and fair. Observers reported a high turnout among voters and an acceptable level of compliance with procedural regulations on the part of election officials. Significantly, our observers did not report a single incidence of an attempt to influence how votes were cast and found no major security incidents. (Note: Local media did report problems in several locations on election day, and in the two days prior to elections, some team members did receive reports of large numbers of voters being left off the voter registration lists and/or not receiving voter cards.) On election day itself we saw very few incidents in which would-be voters were denied the right to vote. Observers in one location described a disgruntled group of people causing a commotion after being told they were not on the registration list, but in the end local officials agreed to allow the group to vote in technical

violation of the regulations. In many locations locally-produced invitation letters were accepted in lieu of voter registration cards, and at a number of sites voter registration lists were simply not used. While this could have been an oversight in some instances, it may also have been a deliberate method of reducing the possibility of potentially eligible voters being turned away.

¶4. (SBU) Most of the polling sites observed were found to be generally in compliance with the procedures established the provincial election commission (KIP). Most polling places were set up according to a standard format, and were kept free of campaign materials. Security was present but not intrusive, and ballots were kept under a tight watch by both election officials and witnesses representing various candidates. Violations of procedures centered largely on the decisions not to use voter lists or to require voters to present their voter cards prior to voting, which were most likely practical responses to the inadequacies of the registration process. The other common procedural violation was a widespread failure on the part of the security to check voters' fingers for ink prior to allowing them in to vote. Less common but potentially more serious, voting booths lacked total privacy at 10 sites, and at four locations the number of registered voters was greater than the number of ballots available.

¶5. (SBU) The U.S. team observed the counting of ballots in 22 locations. Once again, observers reported the process to be transparent and fair, with ballot boxes being opened and ballots being read in full view of witnesses representing multiple candidates. Some minor procedural violations were observed, notably the failure of election officials in some locations to reconcile the number of ballots prior to

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counting the votes. At all sites where counting was observed, turnout was at least 65 percent and often as high as 90 percent of registered voters. One of the monitoring teams visited a "recapitulation center" to which ballot boxes were transported for collection and verification after counting had been completed at individual stations. That team observed significant procedural irregularities at the center and a general lack of supervision on the part of recapitulation center officials. Most observers did not visit recapitulation centers due to a Mission decision that all personnel should return to their hotels by nightfall for security reasons.  
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